We join Consumer's Union in asking that you to consider requiring multichannel video providers to allow an a la carte or choose your channel option so that families and consumers can control the programming that comes into their homes.

We ask you to support measures that would: give consumers the ability to select and pay for only those cable channels they want in their homes via a "choose your channels" and encourage parents to use tools like www.commonsensemedia.org to decide what their children should be allowed to see.

The common sense solution to the decency debate is to let the marketplace decide. Let consumers actually decide what pay TV channels they want to purchase, just as they do magazines. "Choose Your Channels" or a la carte pricing will rationalize pricing and permit customers to keep programming they find offensive out of their homes.

Why if I like FOX or CNN do I also have to pay to subscribe to MSNBC? I subscribe to Time Magazine but don't have to take U. S. News and Newsweek. If I get my children's programming from Noggin is there a rational marketplace reason I also must pay for Nickelodeon? If I enjoy C-SPAN how come I can't get it without being forced to let MTV into my home? I understand that some Americans want to consume vulgar entertainment and tabloid infotainment but I don't want to subsidize the cost of TV peep shows for my neighbor.

So let's adopt a "Choose Your Channels" system. Program providers can earn their living like every other business in America - open their doors and hope that their products and services entice customers to walk inside. Customers would be the winners as the content producers adjusted programming and pricing based on the consumer marketplace reaction, not the closed marketplace of a half-dozen cable and satellite giants who control purchase power today.

Most cable and satellite subscribers don't realize that a big part of every bill goes for subscriber fees for channels you may never watch and don't want. Even if you never watch ESPN, you're probably paying at least 30 bucks a year for it. Figures in the press indicate you'll be paying $46 or more in 2008. Non-viewers of ESPN are subsidizing the cost of ESPN for ESPN users. If ESPN had to create a business model based on revenue only from subscribers who actively opted to subscribe what do you think that would do to sports rights fees -and salaries of pro athletes?

We also believe that any effort to give families and local communities a say in what is broadcast on their public airwaves, and what programming comes into their homes, must address the growing threat of media consolidation. Realistic media ownership rules must be in place to lessen the influence of massive corporations on local broadcast content, as well as to ensure public debate in the local media, including newspapers. Overturning the lax FCC rules, and developing sensible media ownership rules that allow for diverse programming that reflects local community interests and values is a critical first step in restoring balance between American consumers and corporate media giants. At the very least, these rules should not be implemented until the impact of media consolidation on indecent programming can be thoroughly studied.

Finally, we support efforts to empower parents to have more control over the violent broadcast programming that their children may be exposed to. We hope you will encourage parents to use guides such as ours www.commonsensemedia.org to help assess what kids are getting when they have screen time. Increased media literacy is the ultimate solution for the next generation.

Common Sense Media is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping parents and kids make better media choices and to think critically about the messages in their media. We believe that parents and kids together can improve the media landscape…one decision at a time. But government needs to help parents by giving us control over which channels come in to our home.

Sincerely,

James P. Steyer
www.commonsensemedia.org